

degree semantics!

Semantics 3, UCLA Linguistics

Spring 2022

1 this week's goals

- morphosyntactic considerations
- semantic considerations
- what do degrees look like?
- semantic theories of degrees

2 data hacking degrees

- any degree names? demonstratives?
- degree quantifiers?
- adjectives and gradability
 - (1) a. %A is very Australian. *non-gradable*
b. A is very tall. *gradable*
- relevant adjectival constructions (Bresnan, 1973)
 - (2) a. more people / more intelligent *comparative*
b. as many people / as intelligent *equative*
c. too many people / too intelligent *excessive*
d. that many people / that intelligent *demonstrative*
e. so many people / so intelligent *resultative*
f. how many people / how intelligent *degree wh-word*
- adjectives and measure phrases
- a side bar: degree-free languages
 - our first look into cross-linguistic variation in the ontology
 - (although there's some cross-linguistic variation in tense-marking, see Tonhauser 2011)
 - 'The Degree Parameter': Beck et al. (2009); Bochnak (2015)
 - why just degrees?! (is it just degrees?)
- (3) **comparative strategies across languages** (Stassen, 1985; Kennedy, 2007)
 - a. A is taller than B. *particle / explicit degree*
 - b. Compared to B, A is tall. *direct comparison / explicit individual*
 - c. A exceeds B in height. *exceed / predicative*
 - d. A is tall and B is not. *conjoined*

- (4) **equative strategies across languages** (Haspelmath and Buchholz, 1998; Rett, 2020b)
- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| a. | A is as tall as B. | particle / explicit equative |
| b. | A is tall like B. | degree relative |
| c. | A equals B in height. | predicative |
| d. | A is tall; B is tall (too). | conjoined |

- so let's say we want to include degrees in our ontology... what would that look like?

- what's their mereology?
- what would that mean, *a priori*, for plural formation?

(5) **standard interval notation**

- open:** $(a, b) = \{x : a > x > b\}$
- upper closed:** $(a, b] = \{x : a > x \geq b\}$
- lower closed:** $[a, b) = \{x : a \geq x > b\}$
- closed:** $[a, b] = \{x : a \geq x \geq b\}$

- what would that mean, *a priori*, for universal quantification?
- see Rett (2015a) for some fun data on this sort of thing

3 an alternative

- Klein (1980, 1982, 1990); Doetjes (1997), see also Bale (2011)
- a 'Kleinian' a.k.a. partial-functions treatment of adjectival constructions
 - designed to deal with vagueness
 - a big selling point no extra entity in the ontology
 - a few assumptions:
 - * an adjective's domain is partially ordered according to some dimension
 - * for adjectival constructions, context constrains the domain (to some subset) via the relevant **comparison class**
 - * a gradable adjective induces a tripartite partition on its domain: a positive extension; a negative extension; an extension gap ('zone of indifference,' Sapir, 1944)
- (6) for an adjective ϕ ,
 - $\llbracket \phi \rrbracket^c = 1$ iff x is in the positive extension of x at c ,
 - $\llbracket \phi \rrbracket^c = 0$ iff x is in the negative extension of x at c , and
 - $\llbracket \phi \rrbracket^c$ is undefined otherwise
 - * a Consistency Postulate requires any partitioning of a subset of the domain to preserve the original ordering on the entire domain

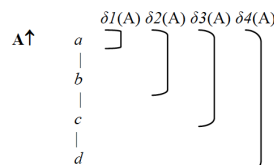


Figure 1: The ordering of degree functions

- considerations against? (Kennedy, 1999)
 - the usual morphosyntactic ones...
 - antonyms in general (a low blow)

- MPs!!!!
- cross-polar anomaly
- comparisons of deviation

4 degree semantics

- old school! Bartsch and Vennemann (1972); Cresswell (1976)

When we make comparisons we have in mind points on a scale. The scale can be represented by a relation, and the points on the scale by the field of that relation. (A relation in set theory is a set of ordered pairs; the field of a relation is the set of all things that are related in one direction or another to something else.) Where $>$ is a relation, we denote its field by $\mathcal{F}(>)$:

(7) A **degree** (of comparison) is a pair $\langle u, > \rangle$, where $>$ is a relation and $u \in \mathcal{F}(>)$.

- might want to add a 'dimension of measurement' element, make it a triple
- these elements are all implicit in modern degree semantics, but nevertheless still important
- gradable adjectives (Seuren, 1984; Cresswell, 1976; Hellan, 1981; Hoeksema, 1984; von Stechow, 1984)

(8) $\llbracket \text{tall} \rrbracket = \lambda x \lambda d. \text{tall}(x, d)$

- (9) a. A ate (lunch).
b. A is (6ft) tall.

- antonyms (e.g. *tall/short*) differ in their ordering (Seuren, 1984; von Stechow, 1984, a.o.).

(10) A is taller than B. \rightarrow B is shorter than A.

- (11) context: B is 5ft tall.
a. $\lambda d. \text{tall}(b, d) = (0, 5]$
b. $\lambda d. \text{short}(b, d) = [5, \infty)$

- degree semantics has a specialized type-shifter that is sensitive to the direction of its scales (Heim, 2000)

(12) $\text{MAX}(D_{+/-}) = \iota d \forall d' [d' \neq d \rightarrow d' <_{+/-} d]$

5 the semantics of comparatives and equatives

- two types of comparatives (and equatives):

1. **clausal** comparatives are those whose internal argument is a clause (has overt tense morphology) or a plausible clausal source ('Reduced Clausal Approach' to e.g. *John is taller than Sue*).
2. **phrasal** comparatives have no plausible clausal source

- (13) a. He doesn't look older than 23 (*is/*looks).
b. No man is stronger than himself (*is). (Hoeksema, 1983)

- the semantics of the comparative and equative (von Stechow, 1984; Heim, 2000):

- (14) a. $\llbracket \text{-er} \rrbracket = \lambda D \lambda D'. \text{MAX}(D') > \text{MAX}(D)$
b. $\llbracket \text{as} \rrbracket = \lambda D \lambda D'. \text{MAX}(D') \geq \text{MAX}(D)$

- (15) A is as tall as/taller than B (is).
 a. $\max(\lambda d.\text{tall}(a,d)) > \max(\lambda d'.\text{tall}(b,d'))$ comparative
 b. $\max(\lambda d.\text{tall}(a,d)) \geq \max(\lambda d'.\text{tall}(b,d'))$ equative
- NPIs are licensed in the targets of comparatives and equatives (Ladusaw, 1979; Seuren, 1984; von Stechow, 1984; Hoeksema, 1983, 1984; Heim, 2003)
- (16) a. She is happier now than ever before.
 b. He would rather die than lift a finger. Heim (1985)
- (17) a. He is as happy to lose his honor as he is to lose so much as a dime.
 b. She is as happy now as ever before.
- the *any* in targets of comparatives appears to be free-choice *any*; perhaps DE degree quantifiers and individual quantifiers license different NPIs (Hoeksema, 1983)
- (18) a. This girl is smarter than almost any boy.
 b. One diamond is more valuable than almost any number of bricks.
- this is predicted given two assumptions (cf. Hoeksema, 1983):
 - that the standard clauses of comparatives are downward-entailing (DE)
- (19) A function f of type $\langle e, \langle d, t \rangle \rangle$ is **downward-monotonic** iff
 $\forall x, d, d' [f(x)(d) \wedge d' < d \rightarrow f(x)(d')]$ Heim (2000)
- that the comparative and equative are degree quantifiers, which means we have to test for downward entailtingness in their degree arguments
- (20) context: A is 6ft tall, B is 5ft tall, C is 4ft tall.
 a. A is taller than B. \rightarrow B is taller than C.
 b. A is taller than B. \nrightarrow B is taller than A.
 c. C is shorter than B. \rightarrow C is shorter than A.
 d. C is shorter than B. \nrightarrow B is shorter than C.
- (21) context: A is 6ft tall, B is 5ft tall, C is 4ft tall.
 a. A is as tall as B. \rightarrow B is as tall as C.
 b. A is as tall as B. \nrightarrow B is as tall as C.
 c. C is as short as B. \rightarrow C is as short as A.
 d. C is as short as B. \nrightarrow B is as short as C.
- the equative entailment only goes through on the 'at least' interpretation of equatives
 - the negative-antonym entailment only goes through if all relevant individuals are considered short because of evaluativity

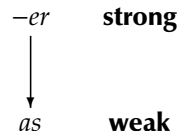
5.1 the weak reading

- in general, clausal equatives are ambiguous between a weak ('at least') and strong ('exactly') interpretation
- (22) A is as tall as B (is)...
- a. ...so you were wrong to say he is taller. exactly'
- b. ...in fact, he's taller. 'at least'
- since Horn (2013), this ambiguity has been characterized just like the inclusive/exclusive ambiguity for *or*: as the result of a quantity implicature

- as lexically encodes the weak, \geq interpretation
- and equatives come to have the strong, $=$ interpretation via a quantity implicature due to the competition between equatives and comparatives
- (this takes for granted that equatives and comparatives are on the same Horn scale, or have identical parse trees (Katzir, 2007), but that there is an asymmetric entailment relationship between them)

- (23) a. A is taller than B. \rightarrow A is as tall as B.
 b. A is as tall as B. \nrightarrow A is taller than B.

Figure 1: The traditional Horn scale for comparatives and equatives



6 evaluativity

- a degree construction is evaluative iff it requires that some degree exceed a contextually-valued standard
- since positive constructions are evaluative, a good test for evaluativity is whether or not a construction entails its positive-construction counterpart (Bierwisch, 1980)

- (24) a. A is shorter than B. \nrightarrow B is short.
 b. A is as short as B. \rightarrow B is short.

- with respect to evaluativity, there are three types of degree constructions:

1. constructions that are always evaluative

- (25) a. B is tall/short. *positive constructions*
 b. Is B tall/short? *polar degree questions*
 c. A is more tall/short than B. *analytic comparatives*

- also any construction with an 'extreme' adjective (Paradis, 2001), which lexicalize evaluativity
- also any construction with an 'evaluative DP,' e.g. *some amount of* (Bolinger, 1972)
- analytic comparatives are only evaluative if there is a synthetic counterpart (Matushansky, 2001)

2. constructions that are never evaluative (when formed with relative adjectives)

- (26) a. B is 5ft tall. *measure phrase constructions*
 b. A is taller/shorter than B. *positive or negative synthetic comparatives*

- for an interesting exception to the MP construction claim, see Doetjes (2012)

3. constructions that are evaluative with negative antonyms (or are marked for other reasons)

- (27) a. How tall is B? *positive-antonym degree questions*
 b. B is that tall (too). *positive-antonym degree demonstratives*
 c. A is as tall as B. *positive-antonym equatives*
 d. Bs are as tall as 100ft. *MP equatives*

- traditionally, the puzzle of evaluativity has been discussed exclusively in terms of the contrast between the evaluative positive construction (25-a) and the never-evaluative constructions in (26):
 - (how can we account for a semantic property that pops up in the absence of degree morphology, but goes away in the presence of degree morphology?)

- a traditional solution (Cresswell, 1976): a null morpheme

(28) $\text{POS} \rightarrow \lambda G_{\langle e, \langle d, t \rangle \rangle} \lambda x \exists d [G(x, d) \wedge d > s]$, for some contextual standard s

“As far as I can tell, there is no independent justification for introducing POS; it is merely a device for fixing up the semantics.” (Klein, 1980, 3)

“The operator “positively,” call it POS, is invisible, which made E. Klein think that it doesn’t exist.” (von Stechow, 1984, 59)

- it also doesn’t exist in overt form in any natural language we’ve seen (Grano, 2012)...
 - ...and anyway, it’s false that evaluativity only crops up in the absence of degree morphology ((27))
 - my proposal (Rett, 2015b): evaluativity comes about as a conversational (Gricean) implicature
 - in positive constructions (and evaluative DPs), it arises as a uninformativity-based quantity implicature
 - * Grice used this sort of implicature to explain the interpretation of tautologies, like *War is war*
 - * unlike scalar implicature, this type of quantity implicature is not cancelable or detachable
 - * but it is sensitive to discourse status, like other conversational implicatures (van Kuppevelt, 1995)
 - * and, like other types of conversational implicature, it’s embeddable
- (29) A: C seems unfazed by the fact that he is a victim of a pyramid scheme.
B: Well, you know, C has always believed that bankers will be bankers.
- (30) A believes that B is tall.
- in all other cases, it arises as a markedness-based manner implicature
 - * x is more marked than y iff they share an identical parse tree (Katzir, 2007) and are mutually entailing but one is more marked than the other
 - * negative antonyms are more marked than positive ones (Lehrer, 1985; Heim, 2007), and so the forms in (27) are otherwise mutually entailing (aside from evaluativity considerations)¹
 - * this is also why analytic comparatives are evaluative when a synthetic one is possible (cf. (25-c))
 - * manner implicatures are non-cancelable too (Huitink and Spenader, 2004)...
- (31) a. I am not ignorant of this... #in fact, I am unaware of it. *litote*, Horn (1991)
b. B caused the sheriff to die... #in fact, he killed him outright. *periphrasis*
c. A is as short as B... #in fact, neither of them are short at all.
- * also like other implicatures, (non-)cancelability is subject to the QUD (van Kuppevelt, 1995)
- (32) A: I’m a little worried about the actor playing me in the movie. Is she tall or short?
B: (to the casting agent) How short is Susan again? (cf. *How tall...?*)
A: That’s fine, as long as she’s short. (cf. *#as long as she’s tall*)
- * and manner implicatures are also (optionally) embeddable²
- (33) The judge believes that B caused the sheriff to die.
a. B was only indirectly responsible for the sheriff’s death *local*
b. The speaker is being indirect for reasons of politeness or delicacy *global*
- (34) C believes A is as short as B.
a. C is confused about heights, but she believes B is short, and she believes A and B are equally tall *local*
b. C knows A and B are both 5ft tall, but she doesn’t know that counts as short (but the speaker does) *global*

¹This is only true of the strengthened, ‘exactly’ interpretation! So I have to stipulate that quantity implicatures are calculated before manner implicatures, or say something about generalized conversational implicatures.

²So there is no reason to encode scalar implicatures in a null operator, there’s nothing special about their embeddability (Rett, 2020a)!

7 degree polysemy

- historically, several different and distinct phenomena:
 - amount relatives (Carlson, 1977; Heim, 1987; Grosu and Landman, 1998)
 - (35) a. Jane drank [_{DP} the champagne [_{CP} they bought that evening]] *individual*
 - b. It will take us the rest of our lives
to drink [_{DP} the champagne [_{CP} they spilled that evening]] *amount*
 - container/pseudopartitive polysemy (Chierchia, 1998)
 - (36) a. Jane smashed [_{DP} the bottle of wine] *container*
 - b. Jane drank [_{DP} the bottle of wine] *content*
 - measure phrase polysemy (Stavrou, 2003; Landman, 2006; Rothstein, 2009)
 - (37) a. The [two cups of wine] on this tray are blue. *substance*
 - b. The [two cups of wine] in this soup is overkill. *measure noun*
 - the ‘how many’ ambiguity (Cresti, 1995; Romero, 2005)
 - (38) How many books must Jane read?
 - a. Jane was told to read specific books. How many of them? *object*
 - b. Jane was told to read a specific number of books. What was it? *amount*
- correspondingly, different and distinct formal accounts:
 - amount relatives (Grosu, 2009; Kotek, 2011)
 - * lots of options, all construction-specific:
 - * syntactic ambiguity from a covert maximality operator in the CP; or
 - * syntactically restricted deferred reference or polysemy
 - container/pseudopartitive polysemy
 - * from Chierchia 1998: a type-shifter C from a container x to its contained substance y
 - (39) a. John smoked two packs of cigarettes.
 - b. $[\lambda x(\text{smoke}(\text{John}, C(x)))] (2(\text{PL}(\text{pack}(\iota \text{ cigarettes}))))$
 - * informally: ‘John smoked the contents of two packs of cigarettes.’
 - * elsewhere (in line with what I will propose; Pustejovsky 1995; Pustejovsky and Bouillon 1995): this is a semantic polysemy with syntactic effects
 - measure phrase polysemy
 - * measure nouns are lexically ambiguous (Landman, 2006; Rothstein, 2009)
 - (40) a. $[\text{glass}] = \lambda y \lambda x. \text{glass}(x) \wedge \text{contain}(x, y)$ *container*
 - b. $[\text{glass}] = \lambda n \lambda P \lambda x. P(x) \wedge \text{MEAS}(x) = \langle n, \text{glassful} \rangle$ *substance*
 - * measure phrases are additionally syntactically ambiguous (ibid.)
 - (41) a. [_{DP} three_i [_{NumP} t_i [_{NP} glasses of [_{DP} wine]]] *substance*
 - b. [_{DP} [_{NP} [_{MeasP} [_{Num°} three] [_{Meas°} glasses of]] [_N wine]]] *measure noun*
 - the ‘how many’ ambiguity
 - * *many* encodes a measurement quantifier (type $\langle d, \langle \langle e, t \rangle, \langle \langle e, t \rangle, t \rangle \rangle \rangle$);
 - * can scope with the modal independently of *how* (Cresti, 1995; Romero, 2005)
 - (42) How many books must Jane read?

- a. $[_{CP} \text{ how}_d [_{C^o} C_{+wh} [_{t_d} \text{ many books }]_x [_{IP} \text{ must John read } t_x]]]$
 b. $[_{CP} \text{ how}_d [_{C^o} C_{+wh} [_{\text{must}} [_{t_d} \text{ many books }]_x] [_{IP} \text{ John read } t_x]]]$

* with the following truth-conditional ambiguities:

- (43) a. **object interpretation:** $\exists x > \text{must}$
 $\lambda p \exists d [p(w^@) \wedge p = \lambda w \exists x [\text{books}_w(x) \wedge \forall w' R w [\text{read}_{w'}(j, x)] \wedge |x| = d]]$
 b. **amount interpretation:** $\text{must} > \exists x$
 $\lambda p \exists d [p(w^@) \wedge p = \lambda w \forall w' R w [\exists x [\text{books}_{w'}(x) \wedge \text{read}_{w'}(j, x) \wedge |x| = d]]]$

* can't account for parallel ambiguities in languages with different quantity question morphology (e.g. Romanian) or syntax (e.g. French; Rett 2008)

- my claim: each phenomenon can be seen as instances of a DP denoting an individual or some degree corresponding to the measure of that individual along some salient dimension (e.g. quantity, volume)
- examples of degree polysemy

- (44) a. [Many guests] are drunk. individual
 b. [Many guests] is more than Bill had anticipated. degree
- (45) a. [Four pizzas] are vegetarian. individual
 b. [Four pizzas] is enough. degree
- (46) a. [French fries] were eaten by the senators. individual
 b. [French fries] is not enough. The senators will need protein. degree
- (47) a. [Four feet of (the) plywood] are warped. individual
 b. [Four feet of (the) plywood] is more than Betty asked for. degree
- (48) a. [The paintings he salvaged] were damaged/was enough.
 b. [How many books] are on the table?is too many?
 c. [Some (of the) cookies] are delicious/is more than they deserve.
- (49) a. Sue accepted money from lobbies like [so many politicians] before her. individual
 b. Sue will get in trouble for bringing [so many politicians] to the party. degree

- properties of degree polysemy

- it is productive across all DP types, provided determiner agreement is properly controlled for

- (50) a. These many children were advanced a grade. individual
 b. #These many children was more than expected. #degree
- (51) a. These many guests asked for their coats the same time. They had called a cab. individual
 b. This many guests asked for their coats the same time. *They had called a cab. *individual

- not restricted to subject position:

- (52) Jane bought three pizzas.
 a. They were delicious. individual
 b. It was more than we needed. degree
- (53) a. Jane prefers three square pizzas to those round ones. individual
 b. Jane prefers three square pizzas to two. degree

- it is distinct from the specific/non-specific ambiguity; (53-a) is itself ambiguous

- a DP can only receive a degree interpretation when the degree it denotes is associated with a monotonic dimension of measurement

- quantity is monotonic...
 - (54) Four pizzas is vegetarian/more than Betty asked for.
- ...but distributive heaviness (forced by *heavy*; Schwarzschild 2009) is not
 - (55) a. Heavy barbells are on that side of the gym. *individual*
 b. #Heavy barbells is more (heavy) than Betty had asked for. *degree*
- although dimensions of measurement are still quite context-sensitive, so
 - (56) Heavy barbells is not enough; to get in shape, you'll need to do some cardio, too.
- another example:
 - (57) context: *The nobles are instructed to bring three 22-karat gold rings to the Queen.*
 a. Lord A brought two 22-karat gold rings. The rings Lord A brought is not enough.
 b. Lord B brought three 18-karat gold rings. #The rings Lord B brought is not enough.
- coupling Schwarzschild's data with the polysemy data:
 - (58) a. 4-inch cables are warped. *attributive individual*
 b. 4 inches of cable are warped. *pseudopartitive individual*
 - (59) a. #4-inch cables is more than Betty asked for. *attributive degree*
 b. 4 inches of cable is more than Betty asked for. *pseudopartitive degree*

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